

top earners and those at the bottom makes our Nation weaker, not stronger.

In a strong economy, we can clearly afford to give low income workers a rise. Our national wage total is over \$4.2 trillion. That is what American employers are paying in wages today. The increase of one dollar that we proposed would raise the national wage total by only one-fifth of 1 percent.

That is a drop in the bucket in the overall American economy, but a significant benefit for low-income workers.

According to the Department of Labor, 59 percent of minimum wage earners are women. Nearly three-fourths are adults. Forty percent are the sole breadwinners in their families. Almost half work full time. They are teachers' aides and child care providers, home health care assistants and clothing store workers. They care for the elderly in nursing homes. They stock the food shelves at the corner store. They clean office buildings in thousands of communities across the country.

The minimum wage is a women's issue. It is a children's issue. It is a civil rights issue. It is a labor issue. It is a family issue. Above all, it is a fairness issue and a dignity issue. It is time to raise the federal minimum wage again. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.

This chart over here indicates clearly what has happened to the unemployment rate with previous increases in the minimum wage. For years, we have often heard that an increase in the minimum wage would see an increase in unemployment. In 1996, we had an increase in the minimum wage to \$4.75 an hour, and we have seen the gradual decline in unemployment. Then we raised it to \$5.15 an hour in September 1997, and we continue to see the decline in unemployment.

This chart over here indicates how long an average CEO has to work in order to make what a minimum-wage worker earns over the year. By 10:06 a.m. on the first working day—say, for January 1st—the average CEO has made what will take a minimum-wage

worker to earn by 5 p.m. on December 31. In just over 2 hours, the average CEO has made what a minimum-wage worker will make by the end of the year.

Finally, this chart over here shows what the poverty line is for a family of three. The lower line here shows what the annual minimum-wage earnings are. What we see in 1999 is the continuing decline in the value of the minimum wage as minimum wage earners fall further below the poverty level.

It is time those men and women who work hard—play by the rules, work 52 weeks of the year, 40 hours a week, 8 hours a day—are not going to have to live in poverty. We are going to insist this issue be before the Senate in these next very few days or weeks.

THE PEACE PROCESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I rise to express my deep disappointment by the failure of the parties to move forward with the peace process in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Peace Agreement was endorsed by the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland, and it offers the only realistic hope for lasting peace for the two communities. We cannot let it fail.

It is hard to understand why this moment was not seized. The Good Friday Peace Agreement is the only way forward—the only way to bring the two communities closer together to build a better future for the people of Northern Ireland.

Decommissioning was not a precondition for the formation of the Executive, but it should take place along with other provisions of the agreement. The Way Forward proposal outlined a clear timetable for addressing the issue. It required clear progress on decommissioning in the coming weeks. General De Chastelain would review progress on decommissioning in September, in December, and again in May 2000. He would need to say publicly that everyone is cooperating. Without significant progress, the Executive would be disbanded.

It is tragic that the opportunity to form the Executive was missed.

The Agreement is the mandate of the people, and must be implemented. It offers the Unionists their key demands—their constitutional position, the principle of consent, an end to violence.

I would hope that once out of the marching season and after a period of reflection and the review by the governments and parties of the working of the agreement—not a review of the agreement itself—that wiser counsels will prevail in September.

I share the frustration expressed by President Clinton that a breakthrough of this potential is being stalled by a dispute on sequencing, which should weigh very little compared to the historic agreement on areas of substance reached in the negotiations.

I applaud the determination of the two Prime Ministers and President Clinton to persist in their efforts, with the support of Senator Mitchell, to overcome this last hurdle.

Despite this latest impasse, all who care about peace must redouble their efforts to find a solution. We must focus our energy on increasing the political dialogue and securing full implementation of the agreement.

A way must be found to build trust between the two communities of Northern Ireland. It is clearly the will of the people of Northern Ireland.

The Governments of Ireland and Great Britain and the United States must continue to work together to revitalize the peace process. We cannot let it fail.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL MONDAY, JULY 19, 1999

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further business to come before the Senate, under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until the hour of 12 noon, on Monday, July 19, 1999.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 2:14 p.m., adjourned until Monday, July 19, 1999, at 12 noon.